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MISSIONARY RESEARCH LIBRARY

THE MISSIONARY'S NEED FOR A MASTERY OF CHINESE AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CULTURE AND THOUGHT OF CHINA.

The following quotation from MODERN SAMOA, A Study of Dependency Government and of Racial and Cultural Change, by Felix M. Keesing of the Institute of Pacific Relations, deals only with Samoa—but its statements are equally true of the problems of the missionary in China today.

"The greatest requirement for such a place as Samoa is an intelligent understanding of and respect for the problems involved. The best weapon in the hands of the official, the missionary or other person seeking to influence the situation is to know what is going on and the forces to be reckoned with. To formulate broad policies is helpful, but not enough; to have good intentions backing wrong action is only to be wasteful of a precious commodity; vast logical schemes are capable of being nullified by small psychological mistakes. True no person however informed can give advice on all situations that will make action absolutely safe, or foretell the final consequences of any attempt to manipulate human life at any one point; man, achieving mastery over nature, has yet but a sorry mastery of humanity. Yet these results will be achieved more approximately if a detailed knowledge is gained of the thought, custom, and psychology of the people being dealt with, and if there is an adequate mechanism to secure continuity of experience."

Young missionaries come to China with a knowledge of Christianity and with professional training, as doctors, teachers, nurses, clergymen, etc.

In order to give the message effectively and render their service, they need to know the medium of communication and the people to whom the message is to be given. The missionary to China needs a knowledge of both the spoken and the literary languages and to work effectively he must have some knowledge of Chinese philosophy, history, sociology, and present day thought.

Too few missionaries have a good working knowledge of the spoken language. It is seldom that one meets a missionary who can get the news of the day from a Chinese newspaper, and even fewer missionaries know enough of Chinese history, philosophy, literature, or art, to discuss any of these subjects with an educated Chinese without losing his respect. Few missionaries have read a Chinese novel or a Chinese history.

Many of the Missions now have the policy of keeping new missionaries in the College of Chinese Studies for not more than nine months, and some Missions—for the sake of economy—have reduced this to six months. After leaving the College of Chinese Studies it is, unfortunately, not unusual for the students to waste weeks or months for lack of a teacher, or to have very

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poor teachers. Many of the young people report that they receive little or no aid in the solution of their linguistic problems from the senior missionaries who are already overburdened with other tasks.

Very few missionaries out in their stations have any aid given them in starting the second language—Wenli. Many never start it.

Few stations have more than the most meager library of books on China.

How can we expect to be leaders in a religious movement aiming at the transformation of the spiritual and social life of a people with rich cultural and intellectual background as the Chinese, if we lack the medium of communication and have only slight access to their thoughts and ideals?

Experience has shown that young missionaries who spend two years at the College of Chinese Studies go out with a good grounding in the spoken language, have made a substantial start in reading Wenli, and have acquired enough of introduction to study about China and in Chinese to enable them to go forward on their own. By the end of two years of College of Chinese Studies work the student is more nearly independent of the lack of trained teachers which exists in many stations.

Many an older missionary who now has lost hope of growth in the language or of an understanding of the country and the people may be given a new hope of effective work by a "refresher" course at the College of Chinese Studies of three months to a year. Even the brief five weeks' Summer Session has done much for many who have attended it.

For many, a stay of a few months at the College of Chinese Studies will prove of more practical value in professional training as missionaries than the study accomplished during furlough years in homeside institutions.

The missionaries who form the habit of constant growth in the language and in a knowledge of things Chinese are those who make the best use of the study opportunities which are theirs during the furlough years.

W.B.P.

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